



Milestones
along the journey of life

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Joan Gallagher

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My Granddaughter, Hazel, aged fifteen, thinks that I should write a bit about my life, (maybe she thinks I have a colourful past).

However, when I sat back and thought about the last sixty or more years, the first thing that sprang to mind was how quickly they have flown, and the second thing I thought about was how lucky my life has been. Oh no, I've never won the Lotto, (yet), nor have I won the Eurovision Song Contest, (yet) nor played Tennis in Wimbledon, nor piloted a Jumbo Jet. But I have been very lucky in Love, Health, Contentment, Family and Friends, and these are the things in life that you cannot put a price on.

J.G. 2003

Joan Gallagher

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Remembering the Early Years

I was born on the 22/4/1937 the eldest of four, (two girls and two boys). That was two years before World War Two began, which means I don't remember the time during the war, but I certainly do remember the years towards the end of it, by the fact that everything was so scarce and hard to get. Anything that had to be imported was just not available, oil, rubber, leather, steel, coal, tea, coffee and many other things that we take for granted today.

No oil meant no cars (even for those who could afford them), as all the oil was kept for the war effort for planes, ships, tanks, army lorries etc. etc.

No rubber meant no tyres for bicycles, (which was the main mode of transport back then, no Wellington boots, and lots and lots of other necessary household things.

No leather meant that the Father of the family, whose job it was to mend all the shoes and boots, had great difficulty. Leather was also used for childrens' school bags, ladies handbags, men's belts, and horses' harness, so because these things couldn't be replaced they were mended and re-mended several times over.

Steel and iron was very important for making and repairing farm machinery, and of course for the shoeing of horses. Horses were extremely valuable to the farmer in those days as they did all the work that tractors do now. .

Coal was a great loss as there was no such thing as central heating in houses or work places in the 1940's or '50's, it was mostly open fires everywhere, although some people did have a range. We in Ireland did have turf, but most of it here in the east of the country was of very poor quality, (wet and soft) and so gave out very little heat. People burned timber mostly.

Although I was only eight years old when the war ended in 1945, I still remember very well how difficult it was for parents of families to get

even the bare necessities of life, the fact that we were not involved in the war, (we were neutral) made little difference as all those commodities had to be imported and had to come by ship either from, or via Britain, and of course Britain was "not amused" that Ireland didn't help them in the war, (our ports would have been useful to them).

(As I am writing, I suddenly realise why I was so aware of all this stuff at only eight or nine years old, you see, my father loved the paper "The Irish Independent"!! (yes, it was out then) and any important or interesting bits he found, he would read out to my mother as she was cooking the dinner, or cutting the bread for the tea, and I was obviously taking a lot of it in.

Rationing

Every household at that time was given a Ration Book from the Government as tea, sugar, paraffin oil, candles, clothes, and several other things were so scarce, that there was a limited amount allotted to each member of the family. For instance, tea was a half ounce per person per week!! This didn't bother most kids, as they nearly always drank milk, which was plentiful, but the adults loved their tea then, as now. Tea, or the lack of it, was a great talking point, "what they wouldn't give for a "dacent cup"!!!.

People tried to make tea from grated carrot which they roasted in the oven, but I don't think it was very drinkable.

Sugar was also a problem, as porridge was mostly eaten for breakfast, and most people liked sugar on it, and everyone took sugar in their tea and cocoa in those days, (coffee was only for Posh people.)

So what most Mothers would do, when the ration of sugar came into the house, (especially where there were big kids that she couldn't always "keep her eye on") she would measure out the sugar into jam jars with their names on, so each had their own. Now this sounds like a great plan, but alas, it didn't always work, because, if "someone's" jar was getting too low too early in the week, they were not averse to "dipping" in another's jar when they weren't looking, and then there would be skin and hair flying.

I also remember watching my Father stitching the wire rims back on to bicycle tyres, he used a cross between fine twine and thick thread, (I think it was called hemp) which was pulled through this wax ball, numerous times, presumably to make it waterproof. Try to imagine how much wear a bicycle tyre would need to have had for the wire to come off it.

There was also a very thriving "Black Market" system going at that time and every area had it's own couple of Black Marketeers. Now, how and where these people got their hands on things like tea and bicycle tyres etc. etc. I don't know, but they thought nothing of charging five, six, or even ten times the proper price for the items. Black Marketing was seriously against the law, and sometimes they got caught

Self-Sufficiency

People had to be very self-sufficient in those days. Every household kept hens so there was always plenty of eggs to eat, and for making cakes and scones, they very, very rarely bought a shop cake or biscuits, as that would have been considered extravagant and a waste of money. (Money was also a very scarce commodity back then).

The trick was to be able to keep your hens laying for as long as possible as hens were notorious for going on "strike" in October or November, just when the demand was at it's highest for all the Christmas cakes and puddings that were made in every household then. Hens simply hate the cold and rain, so they would sulk and stop laying and of course scarcity made the eggs jump to two or three times the price they were in the summer if you had to buy them, so when the hens were giving of their best the eggs were preserved in waterglass and it was those preserved eggs that were used for the Christmas baking.

Almost everyone grew their own potatoes and vegetables, as there were no Supermarkets in those days. All the same, even the people who didn't grow their own, for whatever reason, did not go short, as neighbours were very good to each other, and of course there was great swapping went on, for instance, the household that had a bumper crop of potatoes thought nothing of giving the neighbours a bag of spuds and in return would get a bucket of apples or carrots or a dozen eggs or whatever was their need, even those who had little or nothing to swap would give their time, cutting sticks for the fire maybe, or sweeping the yard, or helping with the hay. As I remember it, money rarely changed hands, the Barter System was the currency of the day among neighbours.

A lot of people who lived in the country also kept a couple of pigs, one to sell and one to kill for the house. That was some operation, my father could never do it, but then he didn't have to, as every local area would have it's own couple of killers, (of pigs I mean).

The salting, curing, and storing of the bacon was very important, the

better the job was done the longer the bacon would last (remember, no fridges). It was usually stored in large wooden boxes covered with clean straw or sacking and kept in the coolest place you could find, which was usually the scullery or pantry, or lean-to dairy that was attached to a lot of farm houses, (today it's called the "utility" room) and it also had to be dog and cat proof.!!!

The money from the pig that was sold was usually spent on the children's winter clothes and shoes, but even more importantly on "certain Christmas expenses" !!! Everything about Christmas was just marvellous, (because in those days Christmas only came once a year!!!) and I remember Santa always managed to arrive in our house, laden, and on time, no matter what else happened.

I still have a Jew's-harp that he brought me fifty six years ago. My brothers got a mouth organ and drums that same year, and our parents ended up "praying" for Santa at five o'clock that Christmas morning.

Playtime

Because there were no cars, or at least very few, we often played out on the road, on tricycles and home made "trucks" that were made from the wheels and axles of "redundant" prams and buggies, the bodywork would be made from old pieces of timber. There was always plenty of old boards and waste timber around everyone's yard, as those were the days when D.I.Y. was a necessity, not a hobby.

We would spend hours and hours pushing each other up and down the road in those same "trucks", and indeed we didn't always come home to our tea in one piece, as "speed" was the order of the day even back then, and many a time we ended up in a ditch of nettles and briars and had the split knees, bloodied noses, torn clothes and sometimes even worse to show for our zealously.

We would then be "dealt with" by our Mother who would be giving out yards to us while at the same time washing and bandaging our injuries. I still have a few scars left from those escapades which will never go away, but then, neither will the memories.

It just occurs to me, I hope you, the reader, won't think that I look on those days as "the good old days", they were neither the good old days nor the bad old days, they were our old days, (good and bad) they were the times we grew up through.

The Procession In Navan

I remember we children had very little regard for money, (which was just as well, as there was so little of it about) money, (or the lack of it) didn't bother us at all, because we on the Borrowaddy road lived a long way from the shop, so what good was money if you couldn't buy sweets!!!. As for ice cream, no electricity meant no fridges meant no ice cream.

But there were two big days every summer when we did get ice cream and all kinds of goodies. The Corpus Christi Procession in Navan, when the town was completely decorated with bunting, flowers, ribbons and holy pictures for the occasion, and the Meath Feis in the Show Grounds, (also in Navan), we looked forward to these two big events for ages, especially if Skryne happened to be playing Navan O'Mahony's in the final of the Feis cup, which I seem to remember they often did!!!.

Of course you couldn't go to Navan in those days without running into the Twinnie Byrne who always had a bag of Fox's Glacier Mints to hand out.

On those two days, the road to Navan would be black with Skryne people all heading for the town with their children on the carrier and crossbar of the bike.

The bikes were "parked" in Butsy Keelan's (no relation) yard in Railway Street for a small fee, where people knew they would be safe until they came to collect them later.

Another day out we used to enjoy was Fairyhouse races. Easter Monday, was the family day, and we would spend the next day or two trying to imitate the Dublin Hawkers (as they were known then) shouting their wares "Apples, Oranges, Pears and Chocolate".

The serious race- goers would wait until Tuesday. They were the people who knew about horses, and betting and winning !!.

Schooldays

School was no piece of cake either, as we here on the Borrowaddy road had to walk two and a half miles to Skryne school, and indeed I remember others who had to walk much further, three or three and a half miles. Gosh, it was an awful drag too, do you know, we would be so hungry when we got home, we would devour platefuls of food.

Most of us were six or nearly six when we started school owing to the long distances we had to walk.

I have to say we never minded walking to school, as everyone had to walk, there was no other way!! (A few people had bikes, but not till they were old enough to be trusted on them). Also, we had great fun coming home, watching lambs playing, picking mushrooms and blackberries, looking for birds nests, and of course there was always the odd orchard to be robbed.

I suppose, now when I think about it, the coming home was the best bit really, as school itself was no picnic, teachers mostly were very hard and strict on both schoolwork and discipline, and of course there was plenty of use made of the cane. You not only had to have your homework done, it had to be correct, or you could get the cane, and God help you if your intelligence was even slightly below average, because then you were caned everyday. Some kids were terrorised and their lives were made a hell. That cane could be used as much and as often as they pleased, and there were many kids who absolutely hated school with a passion in those days, so you can imagine how much they learned.

Whenever we did get home from school, and had our dinner eaten, and the homework done we then had to carry water from the well, and gather sticks for the fire and maybe we would be sent to look for a hen that was "laying out".

We still had plenty of time to play, and we made our own fun, as there were no televisions or computers or video games. We played skipping, hopscotch, rounders, queenie, and sometimes we girls were even

commandeered to make up a football team, or worse, to stand in goals.

Another game that my Father had us playing was cricket, (now wasn't that posh for the Borrowaddy road in those days), and to this day I remember all or most of the rules of the game.

He spent a lot of time one winter sculpting a piece of timber till he turned it into a lovely cricket bat which we had for years.

My Father was just great for playing with us in the summer evenings. I often think, he would have made a great child Psychologist, and he probably didn't know the meaning of the word. He knew exactly how to get the best out of us (his kids), and also, whenever a "serious conflict" was about to break out between us, he was always able to calm the situation through "talks" and "negotiations".

My Mother just ran after us swinging the tea towel when we annoyed her, did you ever get a whack of a wet tea towel across the legs? Yikes!!

The Cousins

As children we went to Drogheda on our holidays to stay with the cousins, for two or maybe three weeks, during the summer, and I have very good memories of those times, for instance, the first time I went to the cinema was with my cousins on holidays, also the Circus came to town while we were there, and we used to love going down The Twenties (I wonder how that place got it's name) and when we were coming home a couple of the cousins would come with us to stay for a couple of weeks at our house.

Of course we would have to show the "Townies" how to climb trees, and carve our initials on them, find wild strawberries, baby rabbits, pinkeens and rob orchards.

The Show In Larry Hogarty's Field

The posters going up for "THE SHOW" coming to Skryne was the cause of great excitement, they were what are now called the fit-ups, groups of actors, singers, and musicians going from place to place, they would put up a marquee in a field for a week or maybe more, and put on short plays, there would also be singing, dancing, music and comedians. Sometimes whole families were involved, Mc'Cormacks was one name I remember.

The marquee was pitched in Larry Hogarty's field (beside the Priest's Cross) a few times, and although the entertainment was much enjoyed, our feet got so cold on the damp grass it would be dinnertime next day before they got warm again.

The "Show" was also held in the football Pavilion a few times which was a bit more comfortable and I remember a showing of "MURDER IN THE RED BARN" that fascinated us all.

Then of course, Fr. Cooney used to show films in the Hall on Sunday nights, 1/6 I think we paid at the door, (around 7p, or 10cent). An odd

good Western maybe, but most of them were rubbish, way over our heads.

I particularly remember when he tried to instil a bit of culture into us by bringing home some film and slides from his holidays in Italy, mostly shots of the wonderful sculptures and statuary of nude men and women, but sure most of us thought it was sheer pornography.

It Was Called “The Rural Electrification Scheme”

We also have to remember that there was no electricity in any part of rural Ireland back then. We in Skryne got “switched on” in 1953. O Lord what excitement.

It is very hard now to visualise what it was like to be able to flood a room with bright light at the flick of a switch, when people had been used to filling the lamp with paraffin oil, trimming the wick, and cleaning the globe (that was a very delicate glass cover that came down over the lamp), and if it happened to get broken it was a real catastrophe as you would have to wait till someone was going to town (Navan, or Drogheda) to have it replaced.

After all that palaver with the lamp, all you got was a very poor light, which was very hard to read by unless you were sitting close to it, and of course then you blocked the light from the rest of the household.

In spite of the less than brilliant lamp light, most Mothers spent all winter knitting jumpers and cardigans for their children, and patching trousers and sewing buttons back on clothes.

My father, as I remember, (and this was after his day’s work) always seemed to be either cutting sticks for the fire, mending punctures and repairing the bikes, or replacing soles and heels on our shoes which was a never-ending job owing to the long walk to school and the poor quality of the leather that was around at that time.

He always seemed to be fixing or making something, and when I was reading Alice Taylor’s book, “To School Through The Fields” when she wrote about her father’s Butter Box, tumbled out in the middle of the kitchen floor, she could have been talking about our house (curses and swears and all) if the particular sized nails or screws couldn’t be found.

Of course, no electricity also meant no running water in houses, so all the water had to be carried from the local well or the pump, especially

in the summer, when all the rainwater that was gathered in the barrels that stood at the corner of everyone's house was used up.

That same rainwater was much valued for the washing of clothes and bathing the children as it was so much softer than the well water, but it was not used for drinking or cooking .

You would be forgiven for thinking that the lack of running water, and poor enough hygiene, would mean more illness in children. This just wasn't so in my experience, the Doctor was very rarely called. In fact the Doctor's car outside a house usually meant that someone was either dead or dying.

Of course, we did get the usual children's' complaints like measles, whooping cough, sceptic throats etc. etc., but our mothers kept us inside and warm, with hot drinks and half an aspirin and before we knew it we were better. My mother's cure for a cold or the flu, for all members of the family, young and old was punch, made from Whiskey, hot water, sugar and God only knows what else, but it worked!! Well, nearly always.

Having My Tonsils Out

There was this one time that my Mother's "cure-all" didn't work for me when at only three and a half I had to have my Tonsils out in Navan hospital, and to this day I can remember everything about it.

After my mother and a nurse got me tucked into bed, my mother was heading off, but she assured me she was coming back, which she did, with sweets and the most gorgeous little white fluffy dog that walked when he was wound up with a key, now, you might think that would keep a three and a half year-old occupied, but this lovely white fluffy dog did nothing to quell my panic when my Mother got up to go for the second time, because I knew instinctively that this time she was not coming back, in spite of her assurance otherwise. I felt utterly devastated and completely abandoned. I was crying my heart out, when this woman patient,(I don't know why I was in a women's ward) came over to comfort me.

As that is over sixty years ago, that woman has probably long since gone to her reward without knowing how much her words of comfort meant to this three and a half year-old.

I can also remember being on the "table" and when the Doctor put the thing down over my mouth and nose (to give me the ether), I panicked and somehow got my two heels under me and very nearly "shot" myself over the end of the operating table, that must have frightened the daylights out of the Doctor, because she landed me with the sweetest slap on the backside that I ever got.

Hospital is never easy for young children, but now an impending stay is usually discussed with the child, and of course a parent can always stay with their child in the hospital now, and thank God for that.

The Gardai

The Gardai were people we had a very high “regard” for in those days, I don’t really know why, as I don’t remember them being any more wicked than they are today, although I do remember an incident that happened at home a long time ago. We were out playing on the road, (you could then,) when we saw Guard Lyons from Dunshaughlin, coming down our road on his bike, and we ran in to tell my mother, who, I noticed, went quite pale, you see, we had, at that time this adorable tiny little black and tan terrier, called, of all names, “Jumbo”. That dog took his place as an equal member of our family.

Anyway, Guard Lyons parked his bike at our gate and came strolling up the path to my mother who was standing at the door, as it happened, all he wanted was directions to some neighbour or other down the road, (who probably was late renewing his gun licence or some such “crime”). So, as the Guard turned and was half way down the path, with Jumbo jumping up and down and barking his very heart out, he uttered the dreaded words that was the cause of my mother’s afore mentioned pallor, “is that dog licensed”?, so, with visions of the shame of her name being in the paper, my mother admitted guilt, but Guard Lyons, (who wasn’t the worst of them as they say), said “well, you better get a license for him then”, and so he “let her off”.

My mother was so relieved that she sent him off with a huge bag of rhubarb strapped to the carrier of his bike, and I remember I was sent that very evening to the Post Office for a dog licence.

Didn’t the Gardai have a busy and dangerous time of it back then.

Borrowaddy

Talking about our road, it was, and still is, known as the Borrowaddy road, so called for hundreds of years, on account of a ghost in the form of a huge black dog (Bothar na Mhadra?) There were legions of stories about how horses wouldn’t pass certain places on the road at night because of the BIG BLACK DOG.

It is sometimes thought that Borrowaddy means road to the sea, as this road is believed to be one of the five ancient roads from Tara, but, the Borrowaddy road starts at the five roads and ends at Edoxtown Cross, (one and three quarter miles).

When I was going to school and for many years after, there were eleven houses on the Borrowaddy road from Edoxtown cross to the five roads, and in nine out of the eleven, the same families lived in them for several generations.

The first house on the road was Gaffney’s, (now, my house) it was built in 1894 by Meath Co. Council for £80.

The couple of fields opposite Gaffney’s house were always known as “Harbour” I have no idea why, (it is at least eighteen miles to the sea) and those fields were covered with blackthorn bushes, so of course the Fairies always lived where there were blackthorns !!. didn’t they?.

Next was the Lone House, long since demolished, it stood at the entrance to Seamus and Kathleen Battersby’s new house. Of course it too had a ghost.!!

Ned and Magso Bennett and their four children had the next house on the left, and then came Ginnie Barns’s gate (where the pylon is), and on the right Halligan’s gate.

Down the lane also on the right, was the lovely old farmhouse of Jem Logan and his wife Nanny, their niece Dot Dillon and Dickie who was a great playmate of ours, as we were around the same age, and on the left, Jem’s brother and sister, Bill and Kate Logan lived with their nieces, Cathy and Rita. Then next on the left, were Polion’s fields,

obviously people who lived there long before my time, as there wasn't even the sign of a house there when I was a child.

Next was probably the most important house on the road, The Forge, owned by Dick and Mona Walshe, this was a buzzing place in those days, as all the farmers had horses, and the Blacksmith was kept busy putting shoes on them. The shoeing of a horse took quite a while, as the Blacksmith had to make the shoes from flat pieces of iron reddened in a huge fire, in the Forge and hammered into shape on the anvil until he was happy that each shoe fitted properly before it was nailed on.

We lived next door and so we spent a lot of time in and around the Forge, and as I think about that now, I can plainly hear the ringing of the anvil in my ears, and get the pungent smell of the hot iron as it was plunged into the big stone trough of water kept for that purpose. That water was also supposed to be the cure of chilblains!!.

Because the shoeing of a horse took some time, the Forge in those days was always a great place for yarns and stories and the exchange of local news.

Opposite Walsh's lived Phil (The Dollie) Martin and his wife Maggie, two "characters" who liked their drop whenever they had a few bob, but no matter how much they had to drink they would nearly always remember to buy a few sweets to hand in to us as they were passing (they lived next door).

I only barely remember when Maggie Martin died suddenly, and four or five of the neighbours, including my Mother went to lay her out, and when my Mother came home, she explained to me and my Brother that Mrs. Martin had died, and that maybe we should go down to the house to say a little prayer for her, while she (my Mother) was getting the tea, and although a little apprehensive, off we went hand-in-hand. Just as we were at the door and about to go in, Ned took fright, took to his heels, and I couldn't see him for dust as he sped out the gate and up the road home, and I was left to go in on my own.

Next house was Keelan's, (my home, where I was born and reared)

this house was in my family since 1910, until it was sold after my Mother died in 1991.

The Clarke family still live in the next house, and have been there for three generations.

Then comes Reilly's cross, so named after the Reilly family who still live there as have many generations of Reillys before them, and is one of the places the BIG BLACK DOG was regularly seen in days gone by.

Just up the road was Joe Murray's gate, then Tommy (Skipper) Donnelly and his wife Sellie and her niece Imelda, and the last house on the road in those days was owned by Jack and Mrs. Drum and their Daughters Myra and Olive. Olive and her husband Packie and their family still live there.

There are now thirty-four houses on the Borrowaddy road, and a large mushroom production factory.

School's Out

We finished in Primary school at fourteen. (Remember most of us were nearly six starting and also we had a seventh class in Primary school then). For very many children that was the end of their education. Some were lucky enough to go further. Quite a few from Skryne and Rathfeigh went to Navan Technical School, and most of us cycled the eight or nine miles to and from Navan.

There were a few who went to boarding school, but very few, and as for University, well that was way out of reach for all but the very privileged.

Emigration was rife in the '40s and '50s, because there was almost no work here, very few factories, no tourist industry, only agricultural work which was scarce and poorly paid.

The problem with emigration in those days was, that it was nearly always the lovely young people who had to go, which was a great heartbreak to their parents and a great loss to the Country. Another problem for young emigrants then, was the fact that they had little education and so could get only the menial jobs. Some done well, sadly, others did not.

Now, when young people go away, it is because they want to, not because they have to, and it is generally to gain experience in whatever they have chosen as their life's career.

As I think about that now, I am so pleased that my Grandchildren can do almost whatever they want in life. Even if today's students don't get the results they expected in their exams, there is absolutely nothing to stop them repeating, and if they don't feel like doing that they can do all kinds of other courses and night classes whereby they can eventually reach their goal.

Corbalton Gardens



*Picking fruit in Corbalton in 1952.
L to r: Joan Keelan (Gallagher), Allie Clarke (Curran), Ted Kelly.
Allie and Ted, two very good friends of mine, died far too young.*

During our summer holidays, lots of us local teenagers worked at picking potatoes and thinning turnips, but we also picked fruit in Corbalton.

Corbalton was owned by Colonel Stourton at that time, but the big walled gardens were leased to people called Normoyle (from Limerick I think.)

Pat Normoyle bought a van as he needed it to bring the fruit to the Dublin market, but he didn't know how to drive, so he learned by going up and down the paths in the gardens, and I believe there was great crunching and grinding of gears, but thankfully he waited until we fruit pickers were gone home before having his "driving lesson".

It was mostly raspberries, black currants, and goose-berries but

sometimes we picked strawberries, logan-berries etc. etc.

We used to go in to Corbalton by the first entrance, which at that time was opposite the Red Lodge (now Dawson's house).

The avenue was lined with huge beech trees that seemed to reach the sky, and the thing I remember most was the number of rabbits that would scuttle everywhere when the rattles of our bikes disturbed them from their grazing. (There are no trees or no Avenue there now, just a big green field).

I also remember this gorgeous Italian called Romano, who used to come down to the gardens in the afternoons, (I think he was a chef in the "Big House") (how exotic was that in those days). We girls all secretly fancied him, but I'm afraid none of us "got" him as he didn't stay very long in Corbalton.

Leaving School

Although I was always fond of school, after some two years in Navan Tech. I became suddenly bored and fed up, and decided, (very much against my parents wishes), that I would embark on a "working career".

I think, being the eldest, I hated always asking for money at home for this, that, and the other, and of course by now I also wanted to buy some lipstick, make-up and some new clothes and generally to become independent. I also wanted to be able to go to the pictures on a Sunday night, like some of my other teenage friends.

We were not allowed into dances until aged eighteen in those days, and girls NEVER went into pubs at that time, it just simply wasn't done.

First Job

My first job was in a carpet factory, where I had to cycle nine miles and be in for 8 am., and the only thing I can remember about that was the fear I had of the little Scotsman who was the boss there at that time, I was scared to death of him, so I only stayed eight months, when I upped and left.

My next job was in a clothing factory, and I have to say this was much more my scene, as I was always very good at needlework, which I loved and still do.

I had good fun in this job, as I liked the people who worked there. Nearly 50 years later, I recently met some of them and we had great fun reminding each other of the things that went on. For instance, one day one of the girls decided she would pierce her friends ears with a large sewing needle at lunch time in the "canteen", (this was an open shed outside in the yard !!!). So when lunch time came we all went to witness this "operation", she started by "Sterilising" the needle over the flame of a match, and after a fair amount of blood and a lot of groans from the "patient", (well they do say that vanity knows no pain) she finally pulled some thread through the holes in her ears to keep them open, and the job was complete, and in spite of the less than ideal conditions, I'm happy to report she is still alive and well.

The Teenage Years

Although, as I said, we could not go to dances until we were eighteen, we could go to "Socials", these were dances run by the Clubs our parents might be members of, such as the I.C.A., the Football club, the Cycling club etc. etc. and they were usually annual affairs to raise funds for the club. I seem to remember the biggest and best of these by far, was the Pioneer Annual Social. People came from miles away, and the Matt Talbot Hall in Skryne would be packed to capacity. Admission was five shillings. That was twelve and a half pence, after we converted to decimalisation in 1971, (cents?, work it out for yourself).

Supper was included in the admission fee, all the sandwiches, fancy buns and sweet cake you could eat. It was at these Socials that we learned to dance, our initiation, if you like, for when we reached eighteen and could go to the Big dances, where we done ballroom dancing to all the big Showbands that were around then, oh!, the joy of it.

Kilmoon Ballroom, (owned and run by Paddy Dillon, aided by the late Joe McDermott, who was the "Chucker-out") was the most local one to Skryne and very popular it was, and as we cycled up that main road on a summer's evening we would hear the music long before we reached the ballroom, and do you know the butterflies would be doing summersaults in our tummies. We just couldn't wait to get in and get our coats off and get out on that floor.

Dancing started at 9 o'clock and went on till 2 am. Other dance halls we went to were the Whitworth in Drogheda, Abbeylands in Duleek, Beechmount and the Young Mens' in Navan, and many others and then the Carnivals would be in different Towns and Villages throughout the Summer.

There was the odd BIG dance in our local hall in Skryne, when one of the clubs that was brave enough took a chance and hired one of the Show Bands, and then Father Fox would parade the car park with a torch to make sure there were no courting couples in any of the cars, but he never allowed for the ingenuity of the fellow from Tara who thought of the one place that Father Fox would never think of looking,

the Fiat Topolino that he himself drove.

I would say that ninety, or maybe ninety five per cent of people of my age met their life's partner in the dance hall. I'm delighted to say, there has been a great revival of ballroom dancing in Parish Halls everywhere in recent years.

Oh, the Dance Bands nowadays are nothing like the big Showbands that were around then but they are all very good musicians, who have been playing music most of their life, simply because they love it, and they are great to listen to and great to dance to, and apart from being a lovely social get-together, Ballroom dancing is wonderful exercise, and long may it continue.

Mobility At Last!

It was around the mid fifties or early sixties that the motor car started to make it's appearance in many homes, and this was the single biggest improvement to the lifestyle of people living in the country. Now, people could take the family away on a Sunday to see different places and there would always be a picnic. (No McDonalds in those times).

Some of the first places my father brought us after we got our first car, (a 1938 Morris 8 bought in 1953 for £55. Reg. ZC.3365) was Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, and those places were nothing like they are today.

Another place I remember my Father taking us on those "Sunday Excursions" as a teenager, was Kilmainham Gaol, and although I never really believed in ghosts, I definitely felt a "presence" when I found myself standing on the spot where James Connolly was executed.

On wet Sundays we were brought to see the Tara Brooch in the National Museum, the Book of Kells in Trinity College, the Art Gallery, the Wax Museum, Christ's Church Cathedral, and lots of other places.

There was a family trip to Knock every year without fail. It was always on the first Saturday of August, the beginning of the holidays.

We had this huge picnic at the same place each year on the way down, and another one on the way back. Dad and the Boys would gather sticks for a fire to boil the water for the tea, while my Sister, me and my Mother buttered the lovely fresh crusty bread that we had bought in Mullingar on the way down to have with the cooked chicken, ham, fruit, apple-tart, chocolate etc. etc. We had our picnic so many times at this same gateway every year that we started calling it our "drive-in Hotel".

I still go to knock every year. I get a lovely feeling of peace and tranquillity there. (I wonder will the next generation of my family keep up the tradition?).

I don't "dine" at "our Hotel" any more, as it has too many bittersweet memories.

Racing On Wooden Wheels!

My Father was a very good racing cyclist when he was young, (probably one of the top five or six in Ireland during the late thirty's and forty's), he raced in Ireland and England, on the track and on the road, I think he favoured the track, this would be in a sports field and they would use cane wheels on their bikes, (this was for lightness).



*The Phoenix Park
Waiting for the winner of An Ras Tealteann.
Sheila Keelan, (McCluskey), Patsy Keelan and George Gallagher.*

A lap of the track would have to be measured so that four laps was a mile.

There were also Flappers which they rode in, but these were outside the Cycling Federation Rules (akin to the G.A.A. ban on foreign games) and if they were caught they were in serious trouble.

I only remember his last two or three big races, as he finished racing when I was still very young, and even at the end of his cycling career

he was bringing home the prizes. Our house was full of lovely things he won over the years.

Other names I remember who raced in my Father's time, were Christol and Anderson.

So another of the highlights of our year in the early 1960's was "An Ras Tealteann", an eight-day bicycle race around Ireland which was an annual affair. In those days it always ended in the Phoenix Park on the eighth day, and there would be thousands there to greet the cyclists at the finishing line, but we would be some of the first there as Dad would have to get us a "good spot" don't you know.

Jimmie Keelan

(note the cane wheels attached to front axle for easy carrying)



The Big Smoke

The experience and skills in tailoring that I learned in Navan stood me in good stead, because in 1956 or '57 I "hit the big smoke" and got a job in Dublin, in "County Wear" a very high-class ladies fashion house owned and run by J.N. Clarke and his two Sons, Richard and Alan. "Richard Alan's" lovely fashion house is still in Grafton St. in Dublin but "County Wear" is long gone. The famous fashion designer Sybil Connolly designed for "County Wear" when I worked there. She later opened her own place in Merrion, and became world famous in fashion.

By coincidence, my sister Sheila, who also worked in "County Wear",



*Alan and Richard Clarke, (of Richard Alan's).
Taken c.1958, when I worked in "County Wear"*

moved to Merrion with Sybil Connolly, (“head-hunted” wasn’t a word we knew in those days), and worked for her for many years. My Brother Patsy also toyed with the idea of becoming a tailor and he too worked in “County Wear” for some time.

Sadly, Sybil Connolly died about five years ago, and at the auction in her house in Merrion I’m delighted to say I managed to buy a small piece of her lovely collection of American Pottery (even if it did cost me an “arm and a leg”) to remind me of those far off days.



Maura Simms, myself and Maureen Connelly in Stephen’s Green at lunch-time when we all worked in “County Wear”

Marriage

I was still in “County Wear” when I met George, he was a drummer in a band ! (not one of the big Showbands I hasten to add) and he also used to sing. Most of his family were very musical and played some instrument or other, and I believe what talent they had, came from their mother’s side, the Lees, who I am told were accomplished musicians, and it obviously continued down through the genes to Liam and Noel of Oasis.

After about two and a half years going out together George and I got married in 1959, and that was the best thing I ever did.

Oh, things were tough at that time, of course they were, but it was the



George Gallagher on drums, Paudie Coleman on accordion (taken c.1957)

same for everybody so we managed, and in nineteen sixty we had our Daughter Anne, who was called after George's mother, whom he absolutely adored and who had died suddenly just before we were married.

One year and five months later, we had our Son Noel. (Yes, that's right, we didn't let the grass grow under our feet in those days), and if you believe that you would believe anything!! Most of us, at that time, were afraid to use contraception, for fear of being "damned in hell".

By now my youngest Brother, Patsy was a drummer in a band, (probably influenced by George) and although they never made the "big music scene", they did have a fair amount of success, they played in London, and of course like any Band worth it's salt in those days they done the German Tour, when they spent a few months in Hamburg, where they had the now "infamous" Gary Glitter as a member of the Band, he was known as Paul Raven in those days.



Jimmie Woods and George.

A Brush With The Law

Slowly, but surely, George and I built up a very good life and home for ourselves, and soon we got our first car, a Morris Minor, second-hand for £45 bought from Joe Curran, we had it for ages, and not once did it ever let us down.

Mind you I did have my one and only "brush with the law" in that same Morris Minor, when I was caught and convicted for speeding. I was on my way to Navan on a wet and miserable Saturday evening when at Smiths of the Bridge Garda O'Loughlin stepped out of nowhere with his hand up. "Have you any idea what speed you were doing" he asked, No Garda I said, well, he said, you were doing 38 m.p.h., and he proceeded to book me.

Anyway, the summons eventually arrived and I had to go to court.

Having never been in court before I had no idea what it was like, so I sat at the back of the courtroom, I soon noticed Garda O'Loughlin standing along the side aisle with a group of other Gardai. Several cases were dealt with but no sign of mine. Just then a man came in and whispered something to Garda O'Loughlin and the two of them left the courthouse.

At that moment the Judge said "next case please" and the clerk gave my name verses Garda O'Loughlin. The Judge, looking weary by now called for O'Loughlin to give him the particulars of the case, so of course he was informed that O'Loughlin was left the courtroom. "What," said the Judge, "Well, is the defendant in court" he asked, and I, with trembling knees slowly stood up at the back of the courtroom, and he said "could you come up here please". So with a heavy heart, and totally mortified I had to walk up the side aisle towards the Judge and in front of everyone.

The Judge looked at me for several seconds before thrusting his hands out in front of him saying, "I don't know what to do with you, Garda O'Loughlin isn't here to give me the evidence, I see here that you were speeding, were you going very fast, he asked, a wry grin on his face, (probably visualising me in this Morris Minor nearly as old as myself),

Oh no, your honour I croaked. Then after much humming and hawing and scratching of his head, he turned to me and asked, "would a pound be all right", and I, so filled with relief that it was all over took a pound from my purse and proceeded to hand it to the Judge when I noticed the whole courthouse was breaking up in laughter.

My Computer Was A Sewing Machine

I worked from home when the children were small, (I was way before my time, now they are all at it, only now they are on computers.) I made skirts for a clothing firm in Dublin, they were delivered and collected once a week.

You need to be very disciplined with yourself to work from home, you need to start and finish at a certain time of the day. I'm afraid I was not so disciplined, because if the sun was shining I was in the garden, and therefore I often found myself working late into the night as the work had to be ready on collection day.

Driving The School Bus

After that I worked for C.I.E. where I trained for my E. licence, got it, and drove a school bus for six or seven years. This is a difficult and rather responsible job, especially in winter when the roads are frosty, (after all it is tomorrow's generation who are being carried).

But thank God I never had an accident.

Although how I didn't have one the day someone let off a Stink Bomb at the back of the bus I will never know. It is indescribably awful.

At that time the drivers had the bus parked at their own house during term time, and had to wash the bus once a week by hand i.e. a sweeping brush and buckets of water, and also, to sweep out the bus. One evening I was under pressure and I delegated the job of sweeping

out the bus to my Son (who was a very reluctant "little helper" but I insisted). A while later as George was walking past the bus he could hear our eleven year old effing and blinding and generally turning the air Blue, and when he was questioned about his awful language, horror of horrors !!! He was missing TOP OF THE POPS.

Family Holidays

Our holidays were spent either camping or caravanning in those days as we had two dogs, Prince and Tiny and they always came on holidays with us, we went a lot to Achill, and all those years later I still love the place and spend a few days there at least every second year.

It is one of the few places that remained unspoiled until recently when the place is now being polluted like a lot of other beautiful places with those modern holiday homes. When oh when, is this practice going to stop.



Sunset in Achill

Pitch and Putt

George was a great "Community" man, he loved being "involved", and I suppose it would be around 1971 or '72 when himself and Harry Dowling, and three or four others including myself, started a Pitch and Putt Club in Rathfeigh. Joe Tobin was very generous in giving the field at a very low rent for five years, and this gave us a great chance to get started, money was "begged" and borrowed, as anyone who ever got involved in the formation of any club knows, it takes a lot of money to get established, especially Pitch and Putt as Greens are very expensive to "make" and of course two mowers had to be bought straight away and a clubhouse (of sorts) had to be erected.

The club members also still remember the valuable help and advice that the members of the Skryne and Brownstown Clubs gave so willingly at that time.

Rathfeigh very quickly became a strong Club thanks to the hard work put in by the members, and the Club is still going strong today.

The Worst Time Of Our Lives

In 1976, after only seventeen years of marriage, George died of a massive heart attack at the age of forty-six, he was buried on our seventeenth Wedding Anniversary, a big strong man who was never a day sick in all the time I knew him.

I just thought the whole world had ended. There are no words to describe what I felt at that time, and for a long time after.

I know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the only reason I didn't fall apart and disintegrate, was the fact that I had two kids, sixteen and fourteen and a half, to finish rearing.

They were both in Secondary school, and one thing I will always be grateful for, is the fact that I did not have to get a job immediately, so I was able to be there with the dinner ready, and the house warm when they came home, as I knew they too were suffering terribly.

One night in bed about a month or six weeks after George died, I felt so awful that I really did think that I too, was going to die. I remember the dying didn't bother me that much, but the thought of leaving them on their own at this age did. So I made a "deal" with God, that if HE would leave me with them until Noel (the youngest) was twenty-two, then I would happily "go".

Mind you, He must have forgotten all about me, because nearly twenty years later I'm still here.

Strangely enough, I never felt as close to God (since or before) as I did at that time, and this helped enormously, as He did "answer" when I "called" on the days when I was at the bottom of the pit.

I do know that some people "fall out" with God when sudden and unexpected death hits their family, and I think it must be even harder to cope when this happens.

I will never, ever forget the sympathy, help, and support of family, friends, and neighbours at that time.

Trying To Get Back On Track

In 1978, (two years after George died) on the same day that Anne (my Daughter) started her Nurse training in the Richmond Hospital, I started a course in "The Irish Farm Centre" on the Naas road, and when I finished that I got a job doing Farm Management Accounts, which entailed visiting each farmer on his farm every two months and recording everything that took place on the farm since my last visit.

It turned out to be a very pleasant and interesting job, as I had about sixty farmers on my books, all specialising in different types of farming, such as dairying, beef, sheep, grain growing, and sometimes mixed farming (the smallest farm was 2 acres, he grew fruit and vegetables under glass, and the largest was 1150 acres and all sizes in between, so I was meeting a different client each day, so I never got bored as there was always a "story" to hear, unfortunately, none of which I can relate here on account of confidentiality.

This very comprehensive set of Farm Management Accounts, when completed at the end of the year, gave a very clear picture of how well the business was doing (or not), and it was this set of accounts that the farmer armed himself with when going to see his Bank Manager to look for the loans and grants for all the huge farm improvement schemes that were going on at that time, such as Herringbone Milking Parlours fitted out with Automatic Milking machines, self-feeders, Bulk Tanks, cattle sheds with slatted units, and the devil knows all. Sure some of them just stopped short of wallpapering them !!!

Unfortunately, it was not very long after, that the Country hit a terrible slump, when interest rates went through the roof, as high as 22% and 23% I recorded in some cases. Now with those sorts of costs it was almost impossible to stay afloat, and indeed some farmers and small businesses did go under, never to recover.

I was doing this job for about three and a half years, and I was enjoying it when Fate took a hand in my life.

An Post

In 1981 I had the good fortune to be talking to Mary at my local Post Office, and she was starting to panic about the fact that she had nobody to do the holiday duty for the local Postman, who's holidays was due to start the following Friday, so on a whim, I said I would "give it a go".

Those two weeks turned into nearly sixteen happy and rewarding years, spent with An Post. For the first time in a very long time I had a job where I got a decent salary, a good pension scheme, and holidays, with pay!!! Wow.

An Post also provide a free uniform, free Doctor and medicine scheme, a company vehicle and they even paid for our driving licence, but I think it is only fair to remember that it took a nineteen week strike by the workers about twenty six years ago, (which was before my time) to bring about the conditions that are enjoyed by the staff today.

Oh yes, we had to be up with the lark, but when you get used to it, you find it is just as easy get up at six as nine o'clock, and there is no doubt, early morning is definitely the best time of day by far. Everything seems to look and smell shiny and new, especially in spring when the Daffodils start to appear, and the trees come alive once again with their fresh green shimmering leaves.

The most memorable thing that happened during my tenure with An Post, was in November 1992, when there was a robbery at Tara Post Office and one of the robbers was shot dead.

This was very traumatic for all of us, and it took a good while to put it behind us.

My car, parked in the Post Office yard, got "caught in the crossfire" and "was shot" several times.

Another thing I clearly remember is how difficult it was to get the Department of Justice (whose responsibility it was) to pay for the damage done to my car by the "firing squad".

It took twelve months of being pushed from Billy to Jack and about a hundred phone calls before it was settled. Lord, talk about trying to squeeze blood from a stone.

Grandchildren

In 1983, when he was only 21, my Son Noel married Ann-Marie and “moved out”, all of fifty yards, to the top of the garden where they lived in a mobile home while they were building their house, and exactly a year later, on their first anniversary, their first child and my first Grandchild was born, (he was named George, after his late Granddad).

They had Hazel three years later in 1987, and Brian in 1988. and those three are the pride of my life.

I also kept a diary for many years. I started it on the day that Brian (my third Grandchild was born). I kept that diary fairly constantly for twelve years, and I find it is a great source of useful family information, as to when and where something happened, etc. etc..I think everyone should definitely keep a diary, as it is only in later years you will appreciate the value of it, like keeping old photographs.

In 1991 Mother died (aged 81) after a short illness, surviving my Father by thirteen years, she was very chuffed indeed about the fact that she lived to see her Great-Grandchildren. The family home was sold after that which is always a wrench.



George, Brian and Hazel (My Grandchildren)

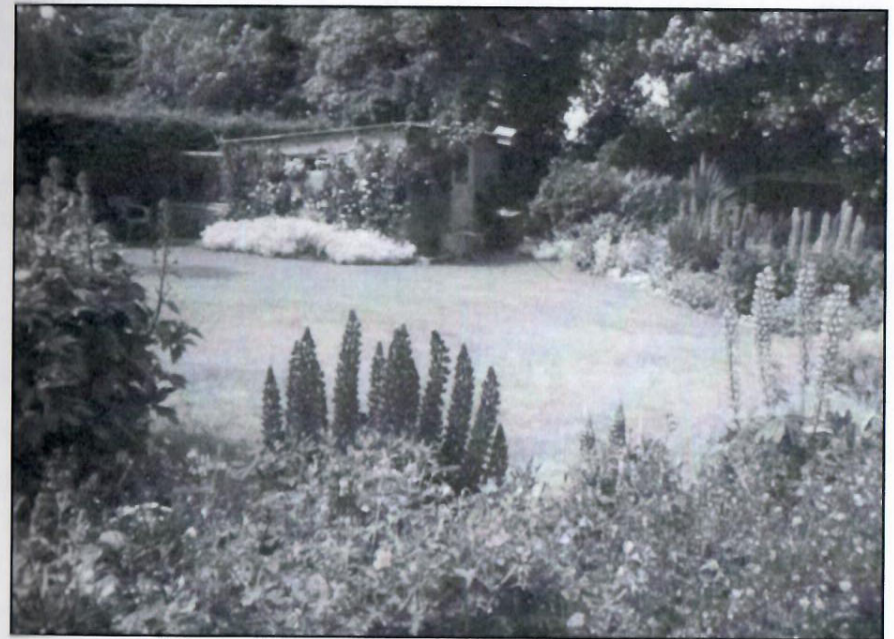
“Gaining A Son-In-Law”

In 1994 Anne married Alan and they bought a house one mile away, and they have spent a huge amount of time making a lovely garden.

I consider myself extremely lucky that I dearly love my Daughter-in-Law and my Son-in-Law, and I realise I’m very fortunate that they all live close by.

Retirement

In 1996 I took early retirement from An Post and “reclaimed” a piece of ground at the back of my house and turned it into a beautiful garden of which I am very proud, it is an oasis of peace and quiet. It is impossible to feel anything other than closer to nature and God in a nice garden.



My Oasis.

Rathfeigh Historical Society

Retirement also gives me more time to enjoy working with the members of Rathfeigh Historical Society, (of which I am Secretary at the moment).

This Society was the “brainchild” of the Late Jim Clarke, of Edoxtown, it was something he talked about for a very long time and eventually in the year 1985 Jim gathered a few of us together for a meeting in the local school and the Rathfeigh Local Historical Society was “born”.



Some members of Rathfeigh Historical Society pictured at the launch of the first book “A Window on the Past” include: Jacqueline Kennedy, Maurice Daly, Vicky von Schmieder, Ann O’Reilly, Avril Molloy, Gerald Perry, Phil McAuley, Joan Gallagher, James Pentony, James Clarke, Josephine Clarke, Ann Mooney, Leo Curran, Mary Clarke, Margaret McAuley, Betty Maguire, Eddie Hynes, Dermot McAuley, Margaret O’Reilly, Very Rev. John Healy.

This is a piece from the Drogheda Independent 3rd. Jan. 1986.

“ Why Avril is digging into the dusty past”.

“Rathfeigh’s Jim Clarke is a bit of a legend in his own right. For when it comes to knowledge of local history, Jim could keep you interested for hours on end. Which was what tended to happen to Jim’s neighbour Avril Molloy whenever she popped in for a visit.

So Avril, together with Jim and a few locals, decided that something should be done to chronicle this wealth of an area that brims with folklore and history.

Avril also visited the Drogheda Independent offices where, she waded through a 100 years of our dust covered issues and managed to glean even more interesting snippets of Rathfeigh and environs. So five weeks ago (end of Nov.) a meeting was called in the local national school with a view to setting up the Rathfeigh Local Historical Society, and the response was surprising with 17 people turning up two weeks later to elect a committee.

The immediate aim of the new group is to bring out pamphlets and information leaflets containing some of Jim Clarke’s vast knowledge, as well as newspaper cuttings.

Eventually they hope to join the National Federation of Local History Societies. The committee are as follows: Chairman Jim Clarke; Secretary Barbara Curran; Treasurer, Phil McCann; John Halligan, Avril Molloy committee members.”

That is what the Drogheda Independent printed in 1986, and I have to say that Jim left us a great legacy, and I’m glad to say the Society is still going strong. We publish a Journal every couple of years entitled “A Window on the Past”, it is a collection of all things Historical, local and not so local.

In 1987 (egged on by Jim) a number of the members “attacked” Trevet Graveyard and cleaned it up, this was a huge job, as it was terribly overgrown. but I remember we had great fun doing it. It looked great

and we were very pleased with the job, but because we didn't continue with the clipping and weeding and mowing and strimming, of course it got completely overgrown again, and about a year ago two or three of the members took it upon themselves to have a go at another "clean-up", and they have done a great job. Trevet Graveyard, (near Dunshaughlin) is reputed to be the oldest Christian burial ground in Ireland, and so is of great historical importance.

Tracing Our Ancestors

Another thing I always wanted to do was to try to trace our ancestors, so now that I had the time, my brother Patsy, his wife Mary and myself went off on the "hunt" and after searching long and hard in numerous cemeteries, Births, Marriages and Deaths Office, the National Archives etc. etc., we were able to go back to the early 1800's and found two more generations of our family, that makes a total of six generations that we can account for. This is very rewarding, but I must warn you it takes a lot of time, and patience.

As a direct result of all this searching and researching, we found the names and dates we needed to erect a Headstone over our Grandparents and Aunt,(who are buried in Skryne Cemetery), something we had talked about doing for a long time. These relations all died long before any of us were born, and I have to say we all had a "nice feeling" when the job was complete. Whenever I have doubts about the hereafter, (and which of us don't) at times like these the doubts are dispelled, as I felt very close to these people whom I had never met.

It was around this time that I started scribbling poetry (Oh all right, my version of poetry then). My Granddaughter, Hazel, (who lived next door), from the age of seven or eight used to run down across the garden every day after school, and say "right, put on the kettle, we'll have a cup of coffee and you can tell me more about the olden days".

Now the olden days to me mean a few hundred years ago, but to Hazel the olden days she wanted to hear about were my childhood and schooldays etc. etc. This went on for so long that I was running out of things to tell her which prompted the following poem. (page 48)

Grandchildren.

*Those kids will be the death of me they have me in a daze,
They keep on asking questions like, how was it in the olden days.
How did you get to school before the bus or Mummy's car,
You never had to walk it, surely t'was too far.
What did you do when you came home
and had your homework done,
With no computers, videos or T.V. what did you do for fun.*

*Well, we had loads of trees to climb, and lambs to watch at play,
We had mushrooms to collect and help build cocks of hay.
We had lots of plums and apples to find, not always with permission,
Sure how on earth would we have time to watch a television.
We had the roads to ourselves to cycle on, no cars to knock us down
And we had absolute riches if we had half a crown.
Our parents never worried about things like kidnappin'
It never even crossed their minds such things could ever happen.*

Time Is Precious

Writing poetry is a great way of making us look at ourselves and our life through our own eyes, because if you think about it, we tend to look at ourselves through other people's eyes, like, how am I looking,? am I dressed properly for this occasion? what will people think if I do this, that, or the other?

Is this job right for me, am I earning enough money?

If I could get one message across to you, the reader, it would be this. Live and enjoy your life now, please don't wait until you have more money or a bigger house or the kids are through college. You have enough money, TIME?, now there's a thing.

You don't know how much time you have, so spend it wisely, and try to make the most of it, because it slips away very quickly.

We are all in such a mad hurry these days that we rarely take the time to LOOK and to LISTEN,

Try it, go on just try it, and if there are things you really want to do, do them now, tomorrow you might not be able, and remember the more you put into life the more you will get out of it.

What's Your Hurry?

*We can microwave dinner in a minute or two
So what if it's tasteless and hard to chew,
With just one little tiny flick of the wrist
We can glean almost anything from a floppy disc.
We can fly to the moon and replace the human heart,
But wait, hold on, let's get back to the start.*

*Take a look at the mountains, the flowers, or a tree,
Listen to the birds singing, and remember it's all free,
Recall the aroma of fresh homemade bread and good Irish Stew,
Then compare Pizza, Lassagne - sure they smell like glue
So slow down, take your time, don't run so fast,
'Cause life races by, and soon it is past.*

In November 1997 I had a heart attack, I wouldn't mind but it was the last thing I wanted at the time, as I had other things to be doing.

Anyway, after having pain for a couple of days, I reckoned I better do something and I went to hospital. They found a blockage, put in a stent and after four days I was home. Mind you it did put a stop to my gallop for a few weeks, but thank God, I made a complete recovery.

I suppose the biggest change to my life is that I gave up smoking, for which I am delighted, but the downside is, I put on a stone and a half, which I am finding very difficult to shed.

Angio Wha !!!

*I never will forget the day I stuck my head inside,
That great big building called the Mater, that's known nationwide,
We'll just do an E.C.G. they said, to see what we will find
And as I put my clothes back on I thought, Lord what a bind.
Just then a nurse appeared and said, you can't go home today,
We've called Professor Horgan in
and he's got something he'd like to say,
Just then professor H. appeared and said, "you had a heart attack
But we can fix you here and now, you see we've got the knack".
Oh no, I said, don't trouble yourselves, sure it was only a little pain
But by now he'd got me in an armlock
and my struggles were all in vain.
They gave me these two tiny pills no bigger than a mouse's dropping
And before I could say "Angio wha!!!", my eyelids started flopping.
I'm at their mercy now for sure, but I just don't give a damn
'Cause the magic pills have done their job and I'm at the
"Happy Farm"
While I was away in "Fairyland" my arteries they unblocked
And four days later I'm at home just feeling slightly Shell-Shocked.*

Meeting Bruce

It is over a year and a half ago now since I first met Bruce, and I fell in love straight away, he is black, and has gorgeous brown eyes. He has his life's work behind him, as he is a retired Guide Dog.

I was vetted, and examined so much before I was given that dog, that I would say it would have been easier to adopt a baby!!.

Bruce has brought me into a whole new "social scene", as even the retired Guide Dogs get invited to all the I.G.D. functions, and where Bruce goes I go.

I "opened" my garden in aid of Irish Guide Dogs one Saturday this summer and I was surprised and delighted to raise over five hundred Euros in a couple of hours, thanks again to all who came.

Ode to Bruce - a Retired Guide Dog

*As I sit here and watch you
stretched out on the grass
With your eyes closed and your
lovely curly coat shining in the
sunshine,
I am reminded of the wonderful
useful life you have led before you
came to live with me.
You have been the eyes of your
Master for nearly nine years,
And you have given him the
freedom to live life to the full.
You walked beside him for all that
time,
And you loved him as much as he
loved you.
As you open one eye to peer at me through the sunshine,
To check if I am still here, I whisper "Go back to sleep, you're
retired now and you're entitled to your dreams in the sun".*

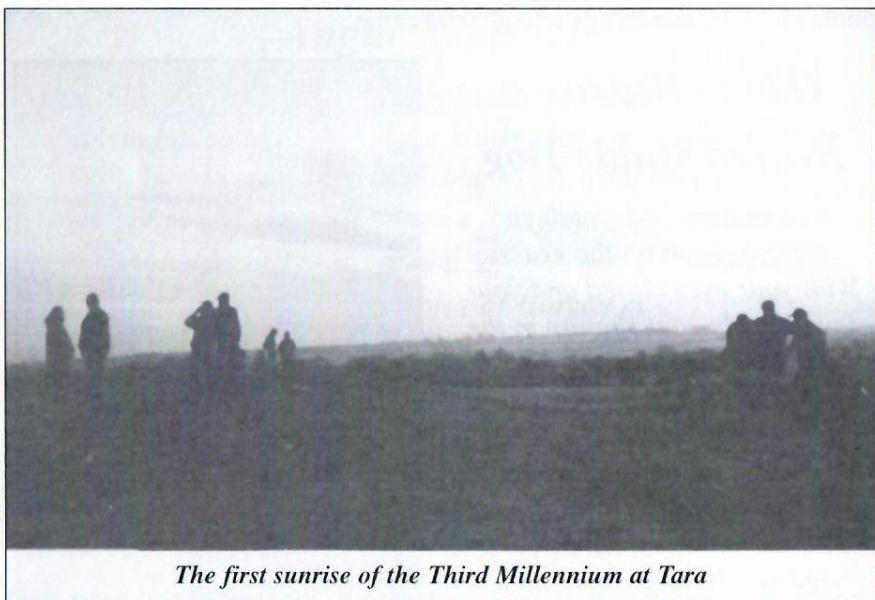


Bruce, Ready for Play!!!

Y2K

The year 2000 was a time I looked forward to for a long time, I just loved the idea of entering a new millennium.

We had Mass and a most enjoyable Parish party in Skryne Hall on the eve of the Millennium, and in spite of all the Partying the night before, I got up at 6am. and went to the Hill of Tara to watch the First Dawn of the Third Millennium, from my most favourite place, there were about twenty other people there with the same idea, some played soft music, others sipped Champagne while we waited for day break, what a lovely morning that was.



The first sunrise of the Third Millennium at Tara

To celebrate the New Millennium I bought a computer and joined the world of Information Technology, and the World Wide Web.

It was also around this time that about half a dozen Skryne parishioners put their heads together and organised a most enjoyable 50th Anniversary School Reunion, it was a wonderful evening and night, and great to see so many people, some of whom hadn't met since we were all at Primary school. I would like to say thanks again to that small group of organisers.



Skryne School 50th Reunion

2001 is, and will be etched on mine, and the rest of my family's memory for all the wrong reasons.

My dear Sister-in-Law Mary, (Patsy's Wife) was diagnosed with cancer in March and died on the twenty first of June.

I still miss her terribly, and find it difficult to accept that she is no longer with us. Mary was great craic, and was one of those people who had no difficulty at all in calling you an idiot if you had done something stupid in her mind, few of us have that disarming honesty.

On December 1st Anne and Alan (my Daughter and Son-in-Law) had a beautiful Baby Daughter, but unfortunately she had to have an operation and only survived a few hours.

She was named Aisling, and died on 2nd December. They are still trying to come to terms with their loss. That had a devastating effect on all the family.

As you can imagine, those two sad events have obliterated anything else that may have happened in 2001, and I am quite sure lots of good things occurred, but I'm afraid they are gone completely from my mind.

Life Moves On And In 2002

Just when you would think that I should sit down, shut up, and be quiet, I got involved in what was to become the most challenging, exciting, and financially rewarding job I have ever had. A Supervisor in a Community school.

(The job came about because the A.S.T.I. members of the teachers union were in dispute with the Department of Education over extra pay for supervision of students at break times, and substitution for absent teachers.)

To cut a long story short, the Government put in place (like they promised) some "outside" supervisors, so that the schools could remain open because in 2001 there was widespread disruption in schools throughout the country when they closed for days in the run up to the Leaving and Junior Cert., which put the students at some loss.

After only a couple of days intensive training, there were eight of us taken on as Supervisors in our particular school, and over a period of some months, we eight, who had never met before became good friends.

I found working with these students exhilarating, as every class was a different experience!!!.

Incidentally, my three Grandchildren, who were all at this school, thought it was the end of their world when I started, I mean how "uncool" was that, to have your Granny supervising in your school. I am happy to say they got used to it, and accepted me and I would like to thank them for that.

This is a large school with the best part of a thousand students attending, and I have to say I was pleasantly surprised that the vast majority of these students, (although very energetic, exuberant, noisy and full of life) on the whole were very nice and well behaved.

I also met a few who could only be classed as "Students from Hell" but very few.

Our Bosses (the Principal and Deputy Principal) were extremely helpful and supportive, after all, most of the eight of us were inexperienced with such a large number of students of that age group, but I think we slid into the workings of the school quickly and easily.

Life Is For Living

*Don't let your feet lift off the ground,
grab life with both your hands,*

*'Cause it's all going on around you,
while you're busy making plans.*

There's no point saying "why didn't I "
when you're no longer able to,

*So live it now and enjoy it,
the wonders of the world are there for you*

*And just because you're all grown up,
don't mean you shouldn't laugh and play*

*'Cause even when life flings bricks at you,
tomorrow may be another lovely day.*

*I hope that somewhere between these
covers you have found something
that tickled your memory.*

THE END